



City of Boston: Carryout Bag Talking Points

1. **Carryout Bag Ordinances have Unintended Consequences.** Bans and fees on carryout bags often have environmental, social, and economic impacts that are not aligned with the intent of the legislation.

Austin, TX

Passed in 2012. Austin bans plastic bags less than 4.0 mil. thick and requires paper bags to contain 80% recycled content.

An assessment of the ordinance conducted by the city in 2015 concluded that “the results do not indicate a clear success”ⁱ. Other highlights include:

- People are throwing away the 4.0 mil bags at a higher rate
- The amount of 4.0 mil bags in the city waste stream in 2015 is nearly equivalent to all of the single-use plastic bags removed from the waste stream since 2013.
- Stores in Austin have reported losing \$60,000 to \$70,000 per week in revenue as a result of customers choosing to shop at a store that provides single-use carryout bags.

2. **Lack of Data to Support Carryout Bag Ordinance Success.** There is a lack of data to support claims that carryout bag ordinances have been successful. This is due in large part to cities failing to establish baselines for carryout bag use or a waste characterization study that details carryout bags in the municipal waste stream prior to passing legislation.

Washington, DC

Passed in 2009. Washington charges 5-cents for paper and plastic carryout bags. The fee is allocated to the Anacostia River Clean Up and Protection Fund.

A city audit of the program was conducted in 2014ⁱⁱ and *The Washington Post* conducted an in-depth review of the fund in 2015ⁱⁱⁱ. Highlights include:

- Claims of a 60% decrease in bag use with admission that there was no reliable estimate for bag use in the District prior to or post implementing the fee.
- Revenue from the tax on carryout bags increased every year since its inception. Showing no reduction in the use of carryout bags.
- The Anacostia Watershed Society reported that it is collecting the same number of plastic bags from trash traps as it did in 2009, before the fee began.

3. **35 Cities/Towns Have Bag Ordinances in Massachusetts. Only 1 Has a Fee on Paper.** Cambridge bans plastic bags (under 3.0 mil.) and places a 10-cent fee on paper. It is clear that the overwhelming majority of towns with ordinances do not view paper bags as the problem.
4. **The forest products industry achieves a consistently high recovery rate.** In 2015, 66.8 percent of all paper consumed in the U.S. was recovered for recycling, and the recovery rate has met or exceeded 63 percent for the past seven years. Paper is the most-recycled material in the U.S. today. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, more paper (by weight) is recovered for recycling from municipal solid waste streams than glass, plastic and aluminum combined. In 2014, 96 percent of the U.S. population had access to community curbside and/or drop-off paper recycling services.
5. **A Bag Fee will be Regressive.** Increasing the cost of basic necessities for low-income citizens who are dependent on public transit and cannot practically expect to bring their own bags every time they go to a retailer. These consumers cannot afford to pay an additional tax on bags while they struggle to cover the increasing cost of basic necessities, and need a packaging option to protect their food purchases from damage and contamination.
6. **Offering a paper bag free of charge at the point of purchase is a natural part of customer service.** Many services are included in the price of the goods consumers already buy, such as rent, electricity, insurance and employee wages. Once there is an obligation to pay fees for bags, those fees are likely to increase over time.

ⁱ [Environmental Effects of the Single Use Bag Ordinance in Austin, Texas](#)

ⁱⁱ [Audit of the Anacostia River Clean Up and Protection Fund](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ [Is D.C.'s 5-cent fee for plastic bags actually serving its purpose?](#)